

PLAN NH Design Charrette Program

Who are we?

PLAN NH is a nonprofit corporation whose members are concerned with the appearance of our communities. They may be designers, planners, builders, architects or others involved in the development process. The common thread linking these people is their concern with the quality of the built environment and its impact on communities.

What is a design “charrette”?

A design charrette is simply a period of intensive work involving both professionals and local citizens as they explore potential solutions to a design issue. It has been referred to as the graphic equivalent of a brainstorming session. Lots of ideas are brought forth, explored by the group, and a consensus is built as to how best to move forward.

Although there is some front-end organizing, a PLAN NH charrette typically brings a team of a dozen professionals into a community on a Friday morning. They will visit the site in question and become familiar with it. Discussion and designing with the public begins after lunch on Friday and continues through the end of Saturday, when final recommendations are presented to the town. An actual document summarizing the work and including plans and other drawings will be delivered to the town shortly after the session concludes.

Why does PLAN NH do this?

PLAN NH feels that the quality of our built environment and the social capital people are willing to invest in helping to design that built environment contribute in a significant way to the quality of life in New Hampshire. Our goal is to assist communities with worthy projects that would not get started if there were significant expenses associated with deciding what to do, as well as to assist communities that have funding but require a clear and effective plan to begin the process. An important beginning point is to tap into a community's resources – people willing to become involved in helping to decide how to proceed with improving their community.

What kinds of projects are eligible?

Two key criteria are that the selected projects will benefit the public at large (as opposed to only an individual, private landowner), and that the projects are of a scale that the design team can make some useful contribution to in a weekend visit.

Examples of projects that would be considered:

- Re-use of a publicly-owned building,
- A redevelopment plan for a small downtown center,
- A plan for mixed-use development in a rural village,
- Development of a cohesive town village,
- Or, another design issue that a community is struggling to resolve

Examples of projects that likely would not be considered:

- A complete master plan
- A redevelopment plan for a large urban downtown area
- A recreation plan for an entire community

How will PLAN NH select projects?

PLAN NH members will evaluate each proposal on the degree to which it demonstrates that:

- ***The project is important to the community***
- ***The project presents interesting design considerations***
- ***The project is of an appropriate scale to be completed in a weekend***
- ***The host community has a real interest in moving forward with the suggestions***
- ***The applicant is required to have recommendations from town or city government officials or boards to ensure that the project is a serious one that the entire town is behind***

What are the costs involved to the community?

Up to Three times each year members donate two days of professional design time to a community that has been selected through a competitive process, and assist it by collaboratively working through potential solutions to a defined design problem. The time commitments for each charrette equates to an average of 16 hours per person, for a team of 10-12 professionals. That's approximately \$25,000-\$30,000 of donated design time provided by PLAN NH to each community.

We do request a contribution to sustain PLAN NH and to cover out of pocket expenses such as supplies for the design team and layout and printing of the final report. The normal contribution requested is \$2,500. If a project is larger or more complicated and is made by a community with resources available to initiate the design effort, a larger contribution in the range of \$5,000-\$10,000 will be requested. PLAN NH will provide suggestions to the local community on finding sponsors so that this money does not have to come entirely out of the municipal general fund.

The only other municipal responsibilities relate to organization and support of the design effort. To the extent that you can find the designers a warm, dry space to work in, that would be helpful (and they do like coffee and donuts!). Some communities have found that a pot luck supper is a good way to stimulate public interest in the project, but that is up to the host community to decide. Lastly, the community has to appoint a steering committee or contact person to coordinate promotion and participation at the local level.

Got a project in mind?

Great! Simply fill out the enclosed application and send an original and one copy to PLAN NH. If additional space is needed to describe your project or will assist in the review of your application, please attach material to the application. ***Applications are due at PLAN NH, P.O. BOX 949, Center Harbor, NH 03226 not later than February 26, 2008.*** All submittals will be responded to and selections will be announced no later than mid-March. If you have questions, please contact Mal Merrill, Executive Director at 1-800-721-PLAN, or email at execdirect@plannh.mv.com. Good luck and thanks for your interest in New Hampshire's communities!